

Preethi Srinivasan



From being a national level swimmer at the age of 8 to making it to the under 19 cricket team and then becoming confined to a wheel chair following a freak accident, PreethiSrinivasan from Chennai has seen all shades of life. Once considered a child prodigy, she now runs '**Soul Free**' a trust to assist people affected with spinal cord injuries.

Born in September 1979, Preethi was like any other healthy child! Excellent in academics and passionate about sports, she was soon making headlines as an emerging cricketer and a swimmer. Her future was considered extremely bright, when destiny struck a cruel blow! At the age of 18 she met with an accident that left her a quadriplegic or crippled below the neck and confined her to a wheelchair.

The initial few years post her accident was the most traumatic phase for a go-getter like her, as she had no alternative but to give up on her passions and unlearn everything she knew and start her life afresh. But for her parents, who never let her succumb to despair, Preethi would have long given up.

It was on her mother's insistence that Preethi set up Soul Free to spread awareness about spinal-cord injuries in India and to ensure that those living with this currently incurable condition are given the opportunity to lead a dignified and purposeful life. The trust also works towards providing a support system for people with disabilities and their family via donations, education and job opportunities.

Despite her efforts, Preethi feels that there is still a long way to go before the physically disabled are treated as equals in the country. She laments the general indifference and apathy in Indian society about disabilities and feels that the discriminatory social set up in the country forces most of the differently abled people to break down and give up. Her trust is working towards bringing a change in the general mindset so that the physically disabled can live a dignified life and become productive members of society.

Her efforts are well lauded and she has been honoured with the Tamil Nadu government's KalpanaChawla award for courage and daring enterprise, the first disabled person to get this award in Tamil Nadu.

Preethi is indeed a symbol of strong faith, incredible work, social commitment and has become an inspiration for many.